

Week Two Handout

“Christian History in America: Visions, Realities, and Turning Points”

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Class 2: The Surprising Work of God: The Great Awakening and the Emergence of Evangelicalism

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Class 1 Goals

Understand the origins, nature, and results of the Great Awakening.

Examine the lives and influences of some of the major individuals associated with the Great Awakening.

Explore the strengths and weaknesses of the particular form of Evangelicalism that emerged out of the Great Awakening.

Opening Question:

When thinking about religious revivals; what do you hope will emerge out of a revival?

What do you fear might emerge out of a revival?

Precursors to the Awakening

- Trans-Atlantic Revival Tradition

- Covenant Renewals in New England

- Holy Fairs in Scotland

- Open air celebrations of the Lord's Supper

- Pietism Associated with German Moravians

- Heavy emphasis on emotion over reason in responding to God

Phase 1 1734-1735

- Jonathan Edwards – pastor of the Northampton Church

- Grandson of Solomon Stoddard

- After the death of a young man – he encouraged people to clean up their lives – avoid idle talk and frolicking

- Soon the entire community experienced profound religious excitement and spread in the Connecticut River Valley.

- There were reports of uncontrolled laughing and weeping, as well as miraculous healings.

- Phase 1 ended when Joseph Hawley, Edward's uncle, committed suicide.

The Conversion Experience

- People become convinced of their complete sinfulness.

- Extended period of grief and despair.

- Awareness of God's grace, mercy, and peace marked the end of the conversion.

Questions Raised by the Awakening

Emotion vs. Reason

The interpretation of ecstatic religious emotions and behaviors

Does religion support the established order, or challenge established hierarchies?

What is the relative importance of formal education vs. anointing of the spirit for ministers?

How do you distinguish between genuine and counterfeit works of the Spirit?

Responses to the Awakening

The Traditional View

Old Lights – Rational opponents of the Great Awakening

New Lights – Emotional/enthusiastic supporters of the Awakening

The More Recent View – Three Approaches

Anti-Revivalists like Charles Chauncy saw the awakening as overly emotional fits of madness that brought no permanent benefits.

Moderate Evangelicals like Jonathan Edwards supported the revival but opposed its “emotional excesses.”

Radical Evangelicals like Tennent and Davenport supported the revival, attacked traditional ministers as “unconverted” and supported female, and enslaved exhorters and preachers and the “spiritual” equality of all people.

George Whitefield

The most important revivalist of the Great Awakening

Known for his dramatic, emotional style, piercing (crossed) eyes, stage actor’s voice and extemporaneous preaching.

Gave seven preaching tours of the colonies accompanied by advanced press coverage

Preached to over 20,000 in Boston (more than the population of the city)

The Strange Story of James Davenport

Yale trained minister in Long Island

Influenced by the preaching of George Whitefield

Went on emotional preaching tours through New England accusing local ministers of being unsaved.

Arrested and expelled from Connecticut for violating a ban on itinerant ministers and libeling ministers.

Returned to Connecticut for a burning of books by unconverted ministers and overly ornamental clothing.

Stopped when he threw his own trousers on the fire.

Later claimed he confessed of excessive emotionalism and ended his career as a moderate Evangelical in New Jersey.

For Table Discussion

Do you believe there was a danger of excessive enthusiasm and emotionalism in the Great Awakening?

Consider the conversion of Hannah Heaton.

Read through the other documents.

Is Edwards provoking too much fear in *“Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God?”*

What do you think about the reactions of Edwards and the Harvard Professors to some of the “excesses” of the Awakening?

Are they in danger of quenching the work of the spirit?

Davenport's Converts

Samson Occom – Most famous Native American convert of the Awakening.

Served as a minister and teacher to the Montauks on Long Island.

Went on missionary tours to the Oneidas in New York.

Helped Eleazar Wheelock raise money for Native Missions and Dartmouth College

Isaac Backus

Became a Congregational and then Baptist Minister

Leader of the Warren Baptist Association and tireless crusader for greater freedom for Baptists in New England and the disestablishment of Congregational Churches.

Jonathan Edwards

Pastor in Northampton

Most important defender of the Great Awakening and American Theologian.

Presided over two waves of revivals in Northampton.

Fired for trying to abandon the “half-way covenant”

Ministered to Native Americans in Stockbridge and then died as President of Princeton.

Gilbert Tennent

Exponent of the more radical aspects of the Awakening.

Published a sermon *The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry*.

Eventually repented of his more radical views and turned moderate.

Charles Chauncy

Prominent minister at Boston's Old Brick Church.

Encouraged them to adopt the half-way covenant and other liberalizing trends.

Opposed the Awakening for excessive emotionalism and anti-intellectualism.

Prominent supporter of the patriot cause in the Revolution.

Seen as a forerunner of the Unitarian movement.

Waves of Revival

1740-1743 – The major phase of the revival in New England accompanied by significant itinerant preaching and new converts and founding new churches.

1739-1745 – Significant revivalism took place in the Middle Colonies around the preaching of Whitefield and the Tennent family. Led to a split in the Presbyterian churches.

1748-1780s – Waves of revivals hit the Southern colonies associated with the ministry of Samuel Davies. Included dramatic growth of Baptist and then Methodist churches and would eventually spill over into the Second Great Awakening.

Results of the Awakening

A Proliferation of Colleges

Dartmouth, Princeton, Rutgers, Brown

Planting of new churches and splits within new churches.

Particular growth of Baptist and later Methodist churches

Transfer of Spiritual Authority from Ministers to Congregations

Greater Questions of Established authority

Perhaps Contributing to the American Revolution

The Establishment of an Evangelical Revivalist Tradition that continues to the present day.

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